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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LAGOS 001419

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STATE FOR AF/W  
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV NI

SUBJECT: BAYELSA SENIOR OFFICIAL DISCUSSES IJAW MILITANTS

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. On November 20 Dr. Godknows Igali, Secretary to the State Government of Bayelsa, told the Consul General and British Deputy High Commissioner he has made headway establishing relations with several Ijaw militant leaders whereby he can now dissuade them from disruptive violence. However, a second generation of militant leaders has authored the most recent kidnappings and presents a burgeoning danger due to their indiscipline and cupidity. Igali also claimed anti-Obasanjo politicians from outside the region were trying to induce the Ijaw militants to foment more trouble in the Delta. End Summary.

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1st Generation Militants: Under Control in Delta & Bayelsa  
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¶2. (C) During a November 20 meeting with the British Deputy High Commissioner and Consul General, Bayelsa Secretary to State Government Dr. Godknows Igali confided that during the past year he has spent considerable time fostering relations with the major Ijaw militant leaders in Delta, Ondo, Bayelsa, and Rivers states. He stated that he spends several hours weekly talking to these leaders. Because of the rapport established, Igali contended he has been able to influence or mitigate their actions. Since engaging in this peculiar brand of preventative diplomacy, the disruption caused by these major Ijaw leaders and their groups has waned significantly, Igali beamed. He then proceeded to identify those who were the most important among the Ijaw militant leaders. According to Igali the most significant Ijaw militant leader is Government Ekpempolo (Tom Polo) whose base is the Gbaramatu Kingdom situated near Warri, Delta State.

¶3. (C) Tom Polo can quickly muster between 2000-3000 fighters, Igali estimated. These fighters have ample ordnance and are better trained and more motivated than their opposites in the Nigerian military Joint Task Force deployed in the Delta. Igali stated that Tom Polo financed and

maintained his small army by operating a protection business wherein shippers paid toll for safe passage through the area Tom Polo controlled. Igali stated that Tom Polo is a relatively disciplined, unextravagant person with a strong sense of Ijaw nationalism. Igali assessed that Tom Polo's primary objective was to improve social-economic conditions as well as the political representation of the Gbaramatu clan and other Ijaws in the Warri area.

¶4. (C) Igali said Tom Polo's ethnic consciousness was both a blessing and curse. Igali claimed to have successfully appealed to Tom Polo to eschew kidnapping for ransom as such acts would becloud the nationalist cause he espoused. However, when Tom Polo felt Ijaw sensitivities were being trampled, he grew rebarbative. For example, Tom Polo hectored that he would disrupt the planned construction of a gas pipeline that traversed Ijaw territory to a terminal facility on the border of Ondo and Ogun states, jurisdictions which Yorubas dominate. Tom Polo saw this as exploitation by the Yoruba political elite, led by Ogun indigene President Obasanjo. Tom Polo described the construction as an affront to the Ijaw which he would not countenance. Only if a like facility was constructed and operated at Brass would he be appeased, Tom Polo declared to Igali. Tom Polo also informed Igali that he opposed Shell restarting production in its western fields until Shell and other oil companies honored their Memoranda of Understanding signed with various local communities, particularly provisions concerning employment for local residents.

¶5. (C) Attempting to clear up a popular misperception, Igali explained that Tom Polo was not a stooge, subordinate or a leader within MEND. Igali characterized MEND as being illusory, nothing "but a briefcase." He continued that MEND was an artifice of convenience, a misleading label, used by Tom Polo during the January/February kidnappings this year so that his group would not take formal responsibility for those

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acts. At that time a less confident Tom Polo was worried the GON might be able to corral his group. Thus, he sought to deflect attribution for the kidnappings. Since then, a small group of Ijaw pseudo-intellectuals have expropriated the acronym and have attempted to take credit for any act against expatriate workers and oil companies. These intellectuals have access to the militants but exercise little or no control over them. MEND is nothing more than a political fiction, Igali disparaged. Igali stated that Tom Polo formerly was the leader of the military wing of the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC). However, he became estranged from FNDIC's president and has since distanced himself from the group. Currently, Tom Polo is a force unto himself. Tom Polo now identified primarily with the Gbaramatu Kingdom, Igali asserted.

¶6. (C) In Bayelsa State the major Ijaw militant leaders were Prince Igido, MacGyver and Ken (full names unknown). Igali also claimed to have positive relations with each, to the point of having discouraged each leader against disrupting oil facilities or kidnappings. Prince Igido's force, Igali reported, numbered several hundred strong. MacGyver and Ken, both of whom could mass a few hundred each, are fugitives from justice, Igali advised. Ken was involved in the murder of nine policemen which led to the Odi massacre in 1999. Neither Ken nor MacGyver are ardent Ijaw nationalists. This duo fit more the mold of criminals turned into petty warlords due to the inability of the government to extend its writ into the remote creeks, assessed Igali.

¶7. (C) Another major militant is Prince (full name unknown) from Ondo State. Prince is upset by the perceived political under representation Ijaws suffer in Yoruba-dominated Ondo State, Igali said. For example, Igali said the People's Democratic Party senator nomination for Ondo South went to a Yoruba, even though Ondo South is inhabited by a large number of Ijaws.

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2nd Generation Militants: Loose Cannons  
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¶8. (C) While recording some success in moderating these major Ijaw militant leaders, Igali lamented a second generation of militants was on the horizon. These leaders have splintered from the more established groups. These leaders and their new groups tend to be less disciplined and more mercenary. Igali attributed the rash of kidnappings in the past few months to this crop of Ijaw militants. Commander Africa in Bayelsa was described by Igali as a second generation militant leader after having broke from Tom Polo's group. Despite his sobriquet, there was nothing ideologically of Africanist about him. Commander Africa's forte is kidnapping for quick ransom. While his support base is small, he was able to win a naira 34 million (approximately USD 265,000) ransom from AGIP during one of the latest hostage-takings.

¶9. (C) Igali also reported that Ijaw nationalist Henry Akpru, who purportedly had helped facilitate weapons purchases by Tom Polo and others, was no longer in South Africa but had returned to Nigeria. Unfortunately, his return home has not been graced by his departure from misadventurism. Henry had been trying to inveigle or induce Tom Polo and other militant leaders to launch an offensive against the oil companies in the Delta. Thus far the militants have demurred. Frustrated by this inaction, Henry then sought to gather a small band of Ijaw youth under his command. The inexperienced Akpru engineered the ham-handed November 22 AGIP attack, which led to the death of a Briton. Igali admitted to us that the encounter between the navy patrol and the fleeing militants was more than coincidental. He stated the GON had received information about the militant plans; the navy patrol was attempting to track the militants when the firefight erupted. According to Igali, the militants opened fire on the navy first.

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No Militant Leadership in Rivers

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¶10. (C) With Dokubo Asari imprisoned, militant groups in Rivers State had fragmented and now there was no central figure to control the majority of them. Igali was concerned that no leader will be able to hold Rivers militants in check, especially as the elections begin to heat up. Asari's boys have splintered and have reverted to criminal acts for money, which worries Igali. Igali stated he would be meeting with senior GON security officials November 29 to make a plea that Asari be released into Bayelsa's custody. Should Asari be released, Igali believed Asari could re-assert leadership and discipline within Rivers State.

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Next: Pressure Stakeholders to Fulfill Responsibilities  
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¶11. (C) Dr. Igali said he will continue to meet Tom Polo and others. However, these meetings are not the long-term solution, Igali advised. For longer-term stability, Igali said companies need to honor MOUs, Niger Delta states need to increase development efforts, and steady pressure was needed on the Federal Government to take action, particularly on projects that would generate employment. Igali recommended all stakeholders be pressured in order to achieve change.

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Northerners Seek Niger Delta Destabilization  
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¶12. (C) Igali stated some anti-Obasanjo Northern politicians

had made overtures to the militants to spawn generalized unrest in the Delta. Tom Polo claimed he was offered over one million USD from northern political figures to mount large scale operations against oil companies, Igali reported.

These politicians made the offer through Henry Apkru. According to Igali, the Northerners tried to convince Tom Polo to join league with them against President Obasanjo, a common foe who has not made good on his promises of economic development to the Ijaw. Tom Polo told Igali that the Northerners were correct in stating that Obasanjo was Tom Polo's enemy. Tom Polo said he dislike Obasanjo. However, the pact the Northerners sought would be allusive. Tom Polo claimed to dislike the Northerners even more than he did Obasanjo and to trust them less than he trusted the President, Igali sardonically recalled. Tom Polo told Igali he would not support this northern proposition.

¶13. (C) Tom Polo was so estranged of this benighted proposition that he requested Igali to accompany two of his lieutenants to Abuja where they would provide the President with details of these overtures, including bank accounts to track Apkru and the responsible northern politicians.

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Comment  
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¶14. (C) Igali's overview of the major figures in the Ijaw militant network was informative although less than comprehensive. We suspect the fuzzy picture Igali provided is significantly tidier than the reality on the ground. There are more small-scale leaders and dozens of groups of which Igali may have no, or only a passing, knowledge. Yet we believe his assessment of Tom Polo is generally accurate as is his caution about MEND being more imaginary than real in terms of operational capacity. The information about the arms supplier Akpru and the alleged criminal inducement of northern politicians is disquieting but also must be looked at with a wary eye. Igali is an Obasanjo appointee and would delight in charging the President's opponents with stirring trouble in the Delta. After all, this is a charge these same opponents have levied against the president for months. Regardless of whether Igali was being honest or meretricious, our discussion with him indicates a dynamic, loose situation regarding Ijaw militant groups. Opportunism and venality

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spawn well in such Petri dish. Thus, we suspect continued militant activity as the clock ticks towards elections. End Comment.

BROWNE